

Research Phase of EMS Workforce Retention Project is Complete

December 2004

The Virginia Office of EMS in cooperation with VAVRS, the Western Virginia EMS Council in Roanoke and Renaissance Resources, a Richmond based business consulting firm, are developing strategies and identifying solutions to enhance the retention of volunteer and career EMS personnel.

The Retention Project objective is to develop a self-help tool kit for local EMS agencies to use to improve the retention of both volunteer and career EMS personnel. The tool kit will have structured, interactive learning experiences designed to optimize the productivity and retention of EMS personnel through their life cycle of service.

The Research Phase of this critical EMS Workforce Retention project is now complete. We have identified 9 key findings:

1. The demand for career and volunteer EMS personnel will grow. The population of Virginia residents 65 years of age and older is projected to grow over twice as fast as the general population over the next five years.
2. Fifty-one (51) percent of all certified EMS personnel are affiliated with volunteer fire and/or rescue agencies.
3. EMT's account for sixty-seven (67) percent of all EMS certifications, followed by Paramedics at eleven (11) percent.
4. The pool of 16 – 34 year old volunteers is decreasing. In sixty (60) percent of all Virginia counties, this segment will grow less than the population as a whole.
5. Virginians are working longer hours and have less ability to get time off from work to volunteer.
6. There is an increased competition for available volunteers. Approximately thirty-five (35) percent of people volunteer from some religious activity/organization. Approximately eight (8) percent of people volunteer for hospitals or other health organizations.
7. EMS turnover rates are not well tracked. National estimates put it at between sixteen (16) and twenty-five (25) percent for EMT's and five (5) to nine (9) percent for Paramedics. Interviews with selected Virginia EMS agencies indicated the turnover averaged nineteen (19) percent of volunteers and eleven (11) percent of career EMS personnel.
8. Training is both a barrier to and an enabler of retention. Studies report that the time and expense of training is a barrier to attracting and retaining EMS personnel. Benchmark EMS agencies in Virginia reported that, on average, seven months is required to prepare a volunteer to perform all aspects of their job. Studies also report training can be an enabler of retention. Benchmark EMS agencies in Virginia report training is a motivator if it is accessible and interesting.
9. Benchmark EMS agencies in Virginia use more than one program to address retention. A variety of retention programs were identified including competency

based pay, social functions, new member orientation training, mentoring, using team based decision making, flexible shift scheduling, and grooming for leadership.

We are now beginning the tool development phase of this project. A project team made up of representatives of EMS volunteers has been identified to assist in the development of the first retention tool. This tool will focus on the principles of retention and will be in a workbook format. Expect another update on this important project in January 2005.